

BEFORE YOU START AN EXERCISE PROGRAM

Before you start an exercise program, there are a few questions to ask yourself to determine whether you should see your doctor first.

Question Yourself

Your first step is to ask yourself how active you want to be. This may sound like a silly question—you're probably planning on doing whatever you're capable of, whether that's a slow walk around the block or a vigorous step class. But if you're of a certain age or have certain cardiovascular risk factors, you may need to see your physician before beginning a program that involves vigorous (as opposed to moderate) aerobic activity.

Here's how exercise intensities are typically defined:

Low-to-Moderate

This is an intensity that can be sustained relatively comfortably for a long period of time (about 60 minutes). This type of exercise typically begins slowly, progresses gradually and usually isn't competitive in nature.

Vigorous

This is an intensity that is high enough to significantly raise both your heart and breathing rates, and is usually performed for about 20 minutes before fatigue sets in.

Are you planning to participate in vigorous activities and are a man over 45 or a woman over 55? You should receive a medical exam first. The same is true for individuals of any age with two or more coronary artery disease risk factors. If you're unsure if this applies to you, check with your physician.

More Questions

Now that you've made it through the first questions, there are a few more to answer. A "yes" to any one of the following questions means you should talk with your doctor, by phone or in person, before you start an exercise program. Explain which questions you answered "yes" to and the activities you are planning to pursue.

- Have you been told that you have a heart condition and should only participate in physical activity recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain (or discomfort) in your chest when you do physical activity? When you are not participating in physical activity? While at rest, do you frequently experience fast, irregular heartbeats or very slow beats?
- Do you ever become dizzy and lose your balance, or lose consciousness? Have you fallen more than twice in the past year (no matter what the reason)?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could worsen as a result of physical activity? Do you have pain in your legs or buttocks when you walk?
- Do you take blood pressure or heart medications?
- Do you have any cuts or wounds on your feet that don't seem to heal?
- Have you experienced unexplained weight loss in the past six months?

- Are you aware of any reason why you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered "no" to all of these questions, and you passed the first round of questions, you can be reasonably sure that you can safely take part in at least a moderate-intensity physical-activity program.

But again, if you are a man over 45 or a woman over 55 and want to exercise more vigorously, you should check with your physician before getting started.

So, are you ready? If you are, but are unsure of how to get started, consider contacting an ACE-certified Personal Trainer or joining a reputable fitness facility. For more information on finding a trainer, or for fitness information in general, visit the ACE website at www.acefitness.org.

By taking the time to evaluate if you are ready to start exercising, you've planted yourself firmly on the path to better health and fitness.

Additional Resource

American Heart Association's Scientific Position on Physical Activity: www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4563

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts™



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